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# NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Forests and Range

## OMINECA REGION RECEIVES BEETLE FUNDING

VICTORIA – Communities in the Omineca region will benefit from another $900,000 to help address the economic impacts of the mountain pine beetle infestation, announced the Honourable Rich Coleman, Minister of Forests and Range, and the Honourable Gary Lunn, Minister of Natural Resources.

"The Province is committed to supporting communities affected by the mountain pine beetle," said Coleman. "As we carry out the Mountain Pine Beetle Action Plan, we will continue to draw on the expertise of people living in the communities to manage the impacts of the beetle and build strong communities with healthy economies."

The Omineca Beetle Action Coalition will receive $900,000 to support economic diversification efforts. The funding will allow the coalition to identify economic opportunities in key areas through a mineral exploration strategy, alternative energy strategy and a strategy to retain and attract residents as the economy evolves.

"We are taking immediate action with our provincial partners to control the spread of the beetle," said Minister Lunn. "Our government is also focusing on the economic infrastructure of those communities that have been affected by the infestation. We are committed to new initiatives that will help modernize those communities across the province."

"People living in our communities have a wealth of knowledge about local forests," said Omineca Beetle Action Coalition director Bernice Magee, also the mayor of Burns Lake. "By working together, we will make the most of the opportunities inherent in the mountain pine beetle infestation."

"Through the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition, communities of the region will be able to develop practical strategies that will fit the needs of each distinct community," said Prince George-Mount Robson MLA Shirley Bond. "I am especially pleased to support the work they do in parts of my constituency, such as Valemount and McBride."

"This newest funding will allow the coalition to build on the work they have done since September 2005 and develop a strategy to expand their economies and reduce the economic impact of the Mountain Pine Beetle," said Prince George Omineca MLA John Rustad.

"The mountain pine beetle infestation could have serious consequences for the economies and communities of the Interior," said Prince George North MLA Pat Bell. "By investing in these communities now, we are providing immediate relief while supporting long-term planning."

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The Omineca Beetle Action Coalition was launched in 2005 with $800,000 in seed funding from the Province. It includes representatives from 12 local governments along Highway 16 from Valemount to Smithers and stretching north to include Mackenzie. It also includes the regional districts of Bulkley-Nechako and Fraser-Fort George.

Today's funding announcement will allow coalition members to continue their work, developing a comprehensive package of background reports and strategies to manage the infestation's environmental, economic and social impacts in the Omineca region.

The Province's comprehensive Mountain Pine Beetle Action Plan is designed to mitigate the environmental and economic impacts of the infestation. For more information, or to download a copy, visit www.gov.bc.ca/pinebeetle online.

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